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Procedia in Vaccinology 1 (2009) 206–209

**Procedia in
Vaccinology**www.elsevier.com/locate/procedia2nd Vaccine Global Congress, Boston 2008

A New Method for Dealing with Ethical Issues in the area of Vaccines and Vaccination

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Keywords: Vaccination refusal; reasons; ethics; history; dispute resolution; world views

People are influenced in a variety of ways when they come to make their choices about the vaccination of themselves or their dependents. Most are well aware that vaccines have led to major decreases in the disease challenge to which they are subjected. Some are also aware that there are small risks of acquiring illness or debilitation from being vaccinated. In general they decide on their and their children's vaccination regimens under the influence of health-care professionals who adopt an attitude that this is the normal and accepted way in which protection against infectious diseases is achieved – so it becomes the “done thing”. But this is not the case for everybody. A significant minority of individuals choose not to vaccinate themselves or their children. Of this group it is possible to identify a more active and crusading branch that seeks to impose its views on the general public by using the media and rallies to advocate their anti-vaccination views. People, who have what they believe are vaccine-damaged children, are amongst the most energetic of this rejectionist caucus.

As infectious disease moves between people who are not vaccinated with a greater frequency than the comparable vaccinees, those who are not vaccinated constitute a threat to the health of those who have taken the vaccine. To improve on this state, it becomes necessary to examine and explore the reasons how a significant proportion of our people choose to opt out of the socially desirable effort to decrease the overall level of infectious diseases.

In Table 1, I summarise the leading reasons given for refusing to be vaccinated.

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1. Reasons given in refusing vaccination

Evidential
Vaccines cause disease
Vaccination does not prevent disease
There is not a serious disease threat
Multiple vaccinations overload the immune system of an infant
Personal or Familial abreaactions to vaccinations
Psychological
Needle-based injections perceived as painful
The body of a naive infant is invaded by an agent
Contrary to the dictates of conscience
Insufficient information to make a reliable choice
Lack of trust in authority
Hear-say
Peer pressure
Family and Neighbours
Pub Gossip
Was not told of availability of vaccinations
Social
Government/Government Agency plot to benefit others
Pharmaceutical Company greed
Medical personnel in the pay of the State
Media focus on damages done and not on wellness achieved
Vaccines are tools to manipulate potency/fertility in wars of
Religion
Unwillingness to be Guinea Pigs in overt or covert trials
Ethical
Resisting the will of God
Not natural
Compulsion removes personal autonomy
Unfair to the less well-off
Production process are unethical when they use cells descended
from aborted human foeti
In testing vaccines do those who take the risk receive
a commensurate gain
Is a vaccinee more likely to engage in immoral behaviour

While there are many accepted and tested methods to deal with issues and questions that arise in the Evidence/Psychological/Hear-say/Social areas, in the area of Ethics the way in which we carry forward debates is both more varied and less structured. To resolve some of the ambiguities and vagueness's in the ethical debate I will outline

the main methods whereby one may proceed to resolve differences in Ethics and suggest a new method that may have greater powers in achieving such ends.

Let me begin with a definition of Ethics that is somewhat different from what is in the Oxford English Dictionary but which is in keeping with the definition given by the historian of Ethics, Henry Sidgwick In alignment with Sidgwick I also take Ethics and Morals to have the same definition. (The word “morals” was used by Marcus Tullius Cicero in 64CE to translate the Greek word, “*ēthikos* or *ethikos*”). (1)

“Ethics are a subset of words that humans use with the intention of modulating the behaviour of other humans in ways that will enhance the survivability of themselves and/or their groups”.

[In this definition there is an assumed definition of the word, ‘word’. Humans have used words to communicate between themselves and to the animal world since they were able to speak which is believed to have happened with the emergence of Cro-Magnon Man some 150,000-200,000 years ago. It is also thought that by the time we see artifacts of *Homo sapiens sapiens* such as grave goods, carved stones, bone needles at about 60,000 years ago, humans were probably capable of having conversations that we might recognise as such. Such verbal communications may have been the additional power or tool that enabled this species to survive the last ice-age that lasted some 70,000 years and finished about 10,000 years ago. So we may come to a definition of words that has them as:

“tools that are used by humans with the intention of enhancing their or their group’s survival”]

It follows from this that the basic and absolute ethic is the single word used in the command form which is applied as appropriate to individuals and groups;

2. Survive !

The listing of the ways which have been used traditionally to resolve disputes in the area of Ethics is presented below. These methods may also be used in other contexts to eliminate differences in the work, play, commercial or home environments.

1. Define clearly where the differences in the conflict lie.
2. Check the data or evidence adduced with care and make the effort to get all parties to the dispute to agree on its substantiality.
3. Let each side of the conflict present its maximum position and then define a compromise in the middle. Agree to share the burden of the compromise.
4. The method of ‘Casuistry’ requires that analogous cases be brought forward and adjustments be made to fit the current circumstances.
5. Is there a ‘Technical Fix’ that can resolve the dispute ?
6. If more than one ethical issue is involved rank the issues in order of importance.
7. Get the values of the substantive matters expressed in a common currency (money, life-years, ..)
8. Let each disputant put on the mantle of an independent arbitrator and review the dispute ‘from outside’.
9. Agree and state what the benefits to both parties would be were the dispute resolved.
10. Enclose the disputants in a closed chamber with decreasing facilities with time until they agree a mutually binding solution.
11. Appeal to a court of arbitration.
12. Force of arms of representative nominee, team or society.
13. Adopt a common ‘world view’.

While most of the above methods are well known and have been used throughout history the last method of coming to a common world view is less usual. This involves making a determination equivalent to that which prevailed from the early 18th century till the modern era between living in a world dominated by reason (the Enlightenment) or emotion/ feeling/ sentiment/ conscience (the Romantics). As there may be overlap between these world views (some emotions may be construed as a reasonable response to a situation) it is in order to offer a new world view definition.

Two totally independent, non-overlapping world views may be defined as one view that holds that all that exists is energy or energy in the form of atoms or matter while the alternative view is that in addition to the energy there is *something else*. I call these views the Energy Only (EO) view as opposed to the Energy Plus (EP) view. The ‘something else’ is not defined but some may wish to see this as a God, Spirit, Soul, Ghost etc.

Armed with these new and modified definitions we are now in a position to return to the ethical issues and examine how we can approach them with a view to their resolution.

Were both parties to come to the table with the joint understanding that the ultimate ‘good’ that they are both seeking is the survival of themselves and their groups then we have expressed any differences in the common currency of ‘survival-enhancing things or acts’. It is also clear that not only are the individual disputants involved but so are the groups and societies in which they live.

Although this seems like the objectification of the terms of the dispute, it is not so. We as humans cannot form objective, emotionless views of the world outside ourselves. But we can increase the reliability of our concepts of that world when we explore, test, examine and experiment with the contents of that world outside ourselves. So it is up to the parties of the dispute to do the necessary investigations so that they both can agree on how they might mutually enhance both of their survivabilities.

It is to be expected that the parties will respect that the basic and absolute ethic they are following, which is that of survival, because it is the same objective that all the living organisms that have ever lived on this planet over the last 3.8 or so billion years have followed. It may be that we are living in a world where the appropriate world view is that of EP but there is little evidence that the ‘P’ part of this has had much to do with life, its emergence and its evolution as a result of its struggle to survive. The ‘P’ stuff may well be part of our universe’s origins but if we can keep our disputes in ethics to the EO notion of the world view then we can hope for more rapid resolutions and more time enjoying the added survivability that this affords.

To apply these methods to the ethical issues that pertain to the use of vaccines is facilitated by the obviousness of the survival value of vaccination. As a result of this intervention coupled with the provision of clean drinking water the average longevity of an American rose from 48 at the beginning of the 20th century to over 70 by the end of that century. Additionally, the human population on planet Earth rose from 1.65 billion in 1900 to 6.7 billion today (2008).

This cannot be the end of the story. With the vaccine tools we have and those that are in the pipeline we should be able to change the way humans look at the struggle for existence on this planet. Fewer people, more interconnectedness, provided with free access to the *Cognosphere* and furnished with the understandings that we can arrive at ethical *consensi* that will create an enhanced harmony of all peoples as we work together to seek progress.

Reference.

1. Sidgwick, H., *Outlines of the history of Ethics*, orig 1886 new ed 1931, 1962 pp.8,11